

Vladimir Kazan-Komarek NYTimes 12/12/72

Before getting into the strange omissions in the writing of this story and its tardy appearance, a recollection of a man mentioned in it, William N. Oatis, AP Prague Bureau Chief of the same period.

My last job as a soldier in OSS (I returned as a civilian) was to write the secret history of its intelligence training. There were to have been but 12 copies of the finished work, to have been done as a picture story. In the shop in which I was there were many "Hollywood types, including a number of script writers who had there a haven from military activity. I was for a while the only man in the shop who had had basic training. (I had been overseas and returned, from Africa.)

I decided that I should make a personal inspection of a group in training, talk to those who did the training, see the place, etc. To this end I was assigned a car and a chauffeur (A nice 1st Lt., I was then a buck private!) and a civilian photographer. I selected an "area" part of the Quantico complex. It had a very GI Army commanding officer who pulled rank on me, didn't keep appointments, had me eat in the enlisted-men's mess rather than with those whose knowledge I needed, the officers, and in general made it impossible for me to do what I had to do.

I knew enough about OSS to know that this stuff didn't go, so I didn't fight the bastard. That was quite contrary to the whole philosophy. Typical was a buck private being the boss of a first lt. and a civilian, for rank meant nothing. I pulled out the next morning, turned in a report, and in 48 hours the C.O. was on a ship. And I was made corporal and put in civilian clothes.

But, having been forced into the enlisted-men's mess, I saw enlisted men. I know something about the business by then, and of all in that training group there was but one who stood out, because of a flagrant violation of all the cliches. "He had one conspicuous feature, his eyeglasses. I am certain this is Oatis. Or, I should say that at the time of his arrest, I was then certain.

One of the more glaring wrong things in this story is the Spanish police finding the corpse of an American citizen, with identification, and not informing American authority. Another is the long disinterest of US officialdom.

Now in the general period referred to in the story, again from recollection, there was dangerously serious US intelligence interest in Czechoslovakia. I recall an incident in which we sent a whole procession of jeeps into the country on an intelligence raid, returning with copious files. It was, of course, an act of war. This was the cold war peak period.

What Finney fails to point out is that the period of alleged operation of a network inside CS exactly coincides with his flight from there and his Paris period, and this with his post-release admission that he "had been working for 'French intelligence'" (inside quotes Finney's). The charge inside C-S was changed from US to "French" intelligence when the pressure was applied by the U.S.

I do recall the incident of the landing of the Soviet plane. "It seems clear enough that this was not an accidental developing of "mechanical" trouble.

During the time he acquired US citizenship there was a law that I think 100 a year could become citizens on the request of intelligence, for services rendered. This glosses over how he became a citizen. I don't know the quota situation.

"He just goes to Cambridge and becomes "president of the Harvard Travel Service"? With no previous experience? And then, after release, just "severed his relationship with the Harvard Travel Service"? An inexperienced man does not become president like that. "He may have started it, and severing then would mean selling it.

The Spanish police had a real autopsy without teeth? And a decomposed body at that? "He just dropped dead of "natural causes" "in a gully"? How convenient and considerate! With "the cause of death as well as identity" said to have been "difficult to establish", and with his papers on the spot, what better reason to not inform US authorities or have a dental check?

If there is more, this should be enough to show that the whole business is phoney. And one is left to wonder why, in a case more than a year old, the Times suddenly finds more than 35 column inches of interest?

Going back to my OSS days, it is no trick to murder without leaving a trace.